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ELECTRONIC DEVICE

Background Information

The present invention relates to an electronic device having the features cited in the preamble of Claim 1.

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An electronic device of this type is known, for example, from WO 99/40285. The electronic module depicted in that publication includes a housing part having a plug-in part, a printed circuit board furnished with electrical/electronic components being inserted into the housing part, the ends of the contact elements connected to the plug-in part being passed through contact openings of the printed circuit board in the interior of the housing part and being electrically connected to the contact openings.

In recent times, sensors have been increasingly used in motor vehicles, the sensors including impact- and vibration-sensitive components, such as micromechanically manufactured semiconductor sensor elements, which as a result of patterning have, configured in one plane, semiconductor patterns that are mechanically very sensitive and that quickly break in response to powerful impacts. If one of these impact- and vibration-sensitive components is mounted on a printed circuit board and is inserted into a housing part in accordance with the known design described above, the contact elements of the housing part extending through contact openings of the printed circuit board, then impact- and/or vibration-stresses are transmitted undamped via the contact elements and the mounting elements of the housing part to the printed circuit board and the component. In response to powerful impacts, such as arise in a collision after a free fall, the micromechanical patterns are deformed by the inertial forces operating in that case beyond the breaking point of the material and in this way are destroyed.

Advantages of the Invention

As a result of the simply and economically designed electronic device having the characterizing features of Claim 1, the vibrations and mechanical impacts operating on the

housing part are transmitted to the printed circuit board and the components situated thereon only in very damped fashion. The printed circuit board having the electronic components is flexibly supported in the housing part by the electrical contact elements that electrically connect the housing plug connectors to the printed circuit board. For this purpose, the contact elements are furnished with elastically deformable segments. Damping elements manufactured separately from the contact elements damp the vibration of the spring-mass system. In this context, the damping elements may constitute, in particular, a low pass and may prevent the transmission of high frequency vibrations to the printed circuit board and the components located thereon. Because the spring suspension is simultaneously realized by the electrical contact elements, there is no need for using separate spring elements, such as spiral springs, for supporting the printed circuit board in the housing part. The electronic device may be manufactured simply and economically, it being possible to employ the assembly techniques that have been used heretofore.

Advantageous embodiments and refinements of the present invention are made possible by the features contained in the subclaims.

As a result of the fact that the elastically deformable contact element segments, which are not inserted into the contact openings, may be deflected in an elastic fashion in at least one direction perpendicular to the printed circuit board, but preferably in all three directions in space, it is possible in accordance with demand to realize a flexible support of the printed circuit board in one, two, or all three directions in space.

It is especially advantageous if when being plugged in the printed circuit board is slipped through the opening of the housing part onto the ends of the contact elements such that the ends penetrate in a contacting manner into the contact openings. This may be carried out particularly easily and economically, because then it is not absolutely necessary, for generating the electrical contact, to solder the contact elements to the contact openings of the printed circuit board.

Stop elements may advantageously be provided, which limit a deflection of the elastically deformable segments, in the plug-in direction of the printed circuit board onto the ends of the contact elements. As a result of the stop elements, it can be achieved that the contact

elements, when the printed circuit board is mounted, give way into the housing interior only a predefined amount. As soon as the elastically deformable segments strike against the stop elements, the ends of the contact elements are pressed through the contact openings of the printed circuit board.

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The stop elements can be configured simply and economically by a fixed segment of the contact elements, which contacts the interior wall of the housing part, opposite the housing opening.

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The end faces of the printed circuit board are separated from the interior walls of the housing part by a gap, which makes possible in the housing interior a certain freedom of movement of the printed circuit board, which is suspended on the contact elements. The damping elements may be inserted into this gap and may connect the edge area of the printed circuit board to the housing part. As a result of the width of the gap and the size and elasticity of the damping elements, a defined damping can be achieved.

In addition, an interior wall of the housing part may be provided with a step, the upper side of which, facing the printed circuit board, constituting a stop for the printed circuit board when it is pushed onto the contact elements. As a result of the step, it is achieved that the contact elements, in a predefined portion of their length, penetrate through the contact openings: The damping elements may then be arranged between the side of the printed circuit board facing away from the housing opening and the frame.

It is especially advantageous if the damping elements are constituted by an elastomer, especially a liquid silicon rubber. In this case, the damping elements, before or after the printed circuit board is plugged onto the ends of the contact elements can easily be inserted into the housing part using a dispenser. The damping can easily be adjusted through the point of application and the quantity of elastomer.

It is also advantageous at the location of the damping elements to provide flow stop elements for limiting the liquid silicon rubber that is still capable of flowing immediately after its application.

Exemplary embodiments of the present invention are depicted in the drawings and are discussed in the following description. The following are the contents:

Figure 2 depicts the electronic device from Figure 1 after the installation of the printed circuit board,

Figure 4 depicts the electronic device from Figure 3 after the installation of the printed circuit board,

Figure 5 depicts a top view of the electronic device according to the present invention when the housing cover has been removed.

In Figures 1 and 2, a first exemplary embodiment of the electronic device according to the present invention is depicted. In this case, it is a sensor, for example, an acceleration sensor, which includes an impact- and vibration-sensitive electronic component, for example, a micromechanical semiconductor sensor element. However, the design of the electronic device according to the present invention may also be used in other electronic devices, which include a housing part having a printed circuit board, arranged therein and furnished with at least one impact- and vibration-sensitive electrical and/or electronic component.

The depicted electronic device includes a housing part 1 having a housing base and four side

walls. An installation opening 3 opposite the housing base may be closed using a housing cover 2. As is depicted in Figure 5, housing part 1 has an outside-accessible plug-in part 6 having plug-in pins 16 for connecting the device, for example, to a cable harness. In the housing interior, plug-in pins 16 are connected via electrical conductor connections 17 to metallic contact elements 10, whose ends 12 protrude from interior side 7 of the housing base perpendicular to opening 3. Plug-in pins 16, conductor connections 17, and contact elements 10 may be manufactured in one piece as metal insertion parts, for example, as stampings. Housing part 1 may be manufactured in a simple manner from an injection-molding mass in an injection molding process.

The side inner walls of housing part 1 are furnished with a circumferential step 30. Contact elements 10 have a segment 14, which contacts interior side 7 of the housing base in a planar fashion and which is connected to conductor connections 17. In addition, segment 14 may be connected to the housing base in a mechanically fixed manner. Lateral arms 18 protrude from segment 14 towards opening 3 of the housing part, the arms being joined to each other by a yoke-like segment 13. Segments 14, 18, and 13 of contact elements 10 enclose in cross-section a cutout 33. In this context, at least segments 13 and 18 are configured so as to be elastically deformable. From segment 13, a segment 11 protrudes vertically towards opening 3 and inner wall 7. Thickened wall segments at ends 12 of segment 11 function as contact zones when contact elements 10 are inserted into contact openings 8 of printed circuit board 4. The printed circuit board may be, for example, a conventional epoxy resin substrate, a ceramic plate, or another known carrier substrate for electronic components. It is provided on its upper side with at least one impact- and vibration-sensitive electrical and/or electronic component 5. Component 5 is connected via printed circuit traces 9 to four hollow-cylindrical-shaped contact openings 8, which are configured as through-hole contacts and which function to receive ends 12 of contact elements 10. In addition, damping elements 20 are provided. They may be made of rubber or liquid silicon rubber or a different material suitable for damping.

The manufacturing process for the device is as follows. After housing part 1 is made available, furnished with contact elements 10, plug-in part 6, and conductor connections 17, damping elements 20 are mounted onto the upper side of step 30 facing opening 3. There they may also be glued or secured in another manner. Then, printed circuit board 4 is slipped

through opening 3 onto contact elements 10. In this context, as soon as printed circuit board 4 contacts ends 12 of contact elements 10, the latter initially give way into the housing interior in the plug-in direction of the printed circuit board, as is depicted in Figure 1. In this context, elastic segments 13 and 18 become deformed. In one exemplary embodiment, segment 13 is deformed until it strikes against segment 14 of contact elements 10, which is provided as a stop element. In this context, damping elements 20 are simultaneously compressed. Since ends 12 of contact elements 10 can now recede no further, they penetrate into contact openings 8 of the printed circuit board, until printed circuit board 4 can be moved no further towards the upper side of step 30. In this context, the penetration depth of ends 12 in contact openings 8 is determined by the height of step 30. In a further exemplary embodiment, the spring tension of elastic segments 13 may also be so dimensioned that ends 12 of contact elements 10 only give way somewhat and then penetrate into contact openings 8, without segments 13 contacting segment 14.

If the constraining force exerted upon the printed circuit board in response to being forced down is eliminated, then the printed circuit board is conveyed into the resting position, depicted in Figure 2, by the elastic spring tension of segments 13, 18 of contact elements 10 and by the elastic tensional force of the damping elements. In this position, the end faces of printed circuit board 4 are separated from the interior wall of housing part 1 by a gap 19.

Printed circuit board 4 is flexibly supported in housing part 1 and at the same time is electrically connected to plug-in part 6 by contact elements 10. Damping elements 20 connect printed circuit board 4 to the upper side of step 30. Opening 3 may be closed using a housing cover 2. Impact and vibration stresses transmitted to housing part 1 are transmitted only in damped fashion to component 5 due to the vibration-damped spring suspension of the printed circuit board. In this context, damping elements 20 are advantageously designed so that they constitute a mechanical low pass.

A second exemplary embodiment of the present invention is depicted in Figure 3 and Figure 4. The same parts are furnished with the same reference numerals. In contrast to the first exemplary embodiment, in the electronic device from Figure 3, the elastic segments of contact elements 10 have a different shape. From a fixed segment 14 furnished as stop element, a single arm 15 protrudes vertically, to which is connected a further segment 13, parallel to segment 14. Segments 13, 14, 15 form a C-shaped flexible contour. From segment

13, a segment 11 protrudes vertically with respect to interior wall 7, whose ends 12 contact printed circuit board 4. The elasticity of contact elements 10 in a direction perpendicular to printed circuit board 4 here results essentially from an elastic bend in segment 13 with respect to segment 15. However, the printed circuit board may also be deflected in response to a
5 elastic torsion and/or a bending of elastic segments 13, 15, parallel to interior wall 7. Overall, therefore, as a result of contact elements 10 in this exemplary embodiment, a flexible deflection of printed circuit board 4 is possible in all three directions in space. Furthermore, in contrast to the exemplary embodiment from Figures 1 and 2, in this exemplary embodiment, damping elements 20 are only inserted into housing part 1 after the installation of printed circuit board 4. Therefore, printed circuit board 4 having contact openings 8 is first
10 slipped onto ends 12 of contact elements 10, until printed circuit board 4 makes contact with step 30. In response to the insertion, segment 13 strikes against segment 14, so that the deflection of the elastic segment in the plug-in direction of the printed circuit board is limited and ends 12 may be pressed into the contact openings. In response to being released, printed
15 circuit board 4, secured on contact elements 10, springs back. Only now are damping elements 20 put in. In this context, it is especially advantageous, using a dispenser, to insert damping elements 20, in the form of an elastomer, especially of a liquid silicon rubber, into gap 19 between the end faces of printed circuit board 4 and housing part 1. In this context, the damping is determined by the elasticity of the material, the distance bridged by the material,
20 and the length of the inserted elastomer strips. Flow stop elements 21 function to precisely adjust the length of the elastomer strips. These elements, as depicted by way of example in Figure 5, may be configured by cutouts in printed circuit board 4 and/or the housing interior wall. As a result of the flow stop elements, the expansion is limited of liquid silicon rubber 20 that is still capable of flowing immediately after its application.